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Social media, video data and heritage language learning: Researching the transnational literacy practices of young children from immigrant families

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Abstract

There are a growing number of young children around the globe whose lives now move across the boundaries between nations, languages and cultures. This new phenomenon—childhood on the move—is shaped by the interaction of two types of mobility, population and technologies (mobile phones and social media apps). The literacy practices of these typically multilingual children often transgress the traditional boundaries of time and space and take place in multiple transnational sites. This chapter is based primarily on a study of young children from Chinese immigrant backgrounds, and their heritage language and literacy learning on WeChat, a popular Chinese-language social media app. While some findings of the study will be reported, the main purpose of the chapter is to map out different aspects a researcher who wishes to research transnational literacy practices of young children or migrant children more generally may consider. The chapter examines critically the detour the researcher took during the fieldwork, and in doing so invites reflection on the nature of video-based research as well as debates about video methods in research with young children in the ‘video society’.

Key words: *heritage language learning, social media, video data, multilingual children, immigrant families*

Bio

Sumin Zhao is a Carlsberg Research Fellow at the University of Southern Denmark. Her research focuses on digital literacies of young (multilingual) children and visual social media. Recent co-edited books include *Critical multimodal studies of popular discourse* (Routledge, 2016), *Advancing critical and multimodal discourse studies* (Routledge, 2017). Her monograph *The Social Semiotics of Book Apps* is forthcoming in 2019 (Bloomsbury). She is the Book Reviewer Editor for *Discourse and Communication*. In 2015 and 2016, Sumin was a Visiting Research Associate at UCL Institute of Education.

The story of *Dawei*: Childhoods across boundaries

*Dawei*¹ was an 8-year-old boy who I met in a small-scale ethnographic project (Flewitt 2011) I conducted in 2016 in collaboration with Dr Rosie Flewitt (Zhao & Flewitt, forthcoming). The aim of the project was to understand how young children from Chinese immigrant families learn and maintain their family's heritage language and culture through intergenerational communication on social media. *Dawei* lived with his Chinese mother, his Portuguese father, and his 6-year-old brother *Xiaowei* in southeast London. *Dawei* and his brother were both born in London. Each summer, they would visit their father's country of origin, Portugal, but paid less frequent visits to their mother's home country China (for a more detailed description of *Dawei*'s case see Zhao & Flewitt, forthcoming). *Dawei* and his brother's family life is representative of a growing number of young children whose lives move across the boundaries of nations, languages and cultures (Martínez-Álvarez and Ghiso 2017; Skrbish 2008; Orellana et al. 2001; Tyrrell et al. 2013). UNICEF statistics (UNICEF 2016) suggest that in 2015 there were 244 million people living outside their country of birth, with 31 million being children under 18. At home, *Dawei* spoke mainly English and occasionally he would converse with his mother in Chinese. As their father did not consider it necessary for *Dawei* and *Xiaowei* to learn Portuguese, they did not speak their father's native language. Apart from attending the local state primary, *Dawei* and his brother were also taking Chinese lessons at a community school on Saturdays. Living in an English-dominated environment, the brothers had few opportunities to use and further develop their heritage language and literacy in a meaningful and contextualised way. For young children like *Dawei*, heritage language loss is a common phenomenon (Verdon, McLeod, and Winsler 2014). Heritage language loss can impact on familial relations and young children's sense of identity (Wong Fillmore 2000; Oh and Fuligni 2010).

In January 2011, a new social media app called WeChat (or 微信 in Chinese) developed by Tencent was launched in China. In the succeeding years, WeChat became a key digital communication channel for the Chinese-speaking population both inside and outside of China (Yu, Huang, and Liu 2017; Zhou and Gui 2017). At the time of writing, it is the fourth most popular social media services in the world with 980 million monthly active users (Statistica

¹ Dawei and Xiaowei are the Chinese nicknames of the brothers. Da (big) and Xiao (little) in the name indicate the birth order. The nicknames are retained, with child and parental permission, as they are key to some of the WeChat conversations.

2018). *Dawei*'s mother joined WeChat in 2014 to connect with families, relatives and friends in China as well as Chinese speaking friends in the UK. At home, *Dawei* liked to observe his mother chatting on WeChat. He discovered that his mother would type Chinese characters on iPad using *Pinyin*—the romanisation of Chinese—as the input method. This discovery enabled *Dawei* to participate in his mother's WeChat conversations (for details see Zhao & Flewitt, forthcoming). Research of children in the European context has shown that younger children (under eight) use social media often through participating in their parents' social media practices (Holloway, Green, and Livingstone 2013; Marsh et al. 2017; Zaman et al. 2016). For *Dawei* and several other children in the project, WeChat became an important site for learning and maintain their heritage language and culture

Understanding new forms of practices as exemplified in *Dawei*'s social media practices has emerged as a central agenda in language and literacy research in recent years. This has led to various attempts to reconceptualise language and literacy in an age of global digital mobility. New theories often emphasise the notion of 'trans', be it—at the level of interaction—translanguaging (Li 2018), or—at the level of practice—transnational literacies (Hawkins 2018; Kell 2017; Warriner 2009). There have been several studies of transnational literacy practices of multilingual adolescences and young people using social media (Lam and Rosario-Ramos 2009; Stewart 2014; Wang 2017). Relatively little is known about similar practices of younger children (under 8). To bridge this gap in our knowledge and to study literacy practices that transgress the traditional spatial and temporal boundaries call for innovative methods and flexible methodological design.

Let's play a game: Family literacy practices across boundaries

Figure 1 includes the screen capture of a WeChat exchange between *Dawei* and three Chinese speaking adults (CM2, CM3, CF2) from his mother's WeChat contact lists. The excerpt is taken from an hour-long episode in which *Dawei* and *Xiaowei* chatted with five of his mother's high school classmates living in China.

<<Insert Figure 1 Here>>

Figure 1. WeChat Exchange: Let's Play a Game (adopted from Zhao & Flewitt forthcoming)

In this exchange, *Dawei* and the adults used a mixture of written Chinese and various visual resources available on the WeChat interface such as emojis and stickers. The exchange began

with *Dawei* inviting one adult (CM2) to ‘*wan youxi*’ (play a game, L42), and they subsequently played two rounds of rock-paper-scissors using emojis. The exchange ended with *Dawei* declaring victory (L 51) and the adult conceding defeat (L 52). The game was interrupted briefly by two adults (CM3, CF2) greeting *Dawei* (L43-44). This exchange showcases three key characteristics of young multilingual children’s language and literacy practices on social media: multimodal (Kress 2009), translinguistic (Li 2018), and polyadic (Zhao & Flewitt, forthcoming). While the exchange appeared to be relatively straightforward at the textual, or the interactional level, the context of the interaction is far from simple, as illustrated in Figure 2.

<<Insert Figure 2 here>>

Figure 2: Conversational Context: The Reunion Dinner (adopted from Zhao & Flewitt forthcoming)

As shown in Figure 2, *Dawei*’s exchange with the adults on WeChat was not an isolated communicative event, but one of the three conversations took place simultaneously. In China, his mother’s school friends were having their annual reunion dinner and interacting with each other both face-to-face and on WeChat. Through a group chat, they were also interacting with their former classmates in different geographic locations in China and overseas, including *Dawei*’s mother. While in London, *Dawei*, his brother and their mother were visiting a Chinese friend who lived in the same area. Their mother was chatting with her friend while attending to the high school group chat from time to time. At one point, *Dawei* took over the *WeChat* conversation from his mother and started an extended exchange with a group of five of his mother’s friends. During the WeChat conversation, he also encouraged *Xiaowei* to join in.

At the interactional level, *Dawei*’s WeChat conversations move between the boundaries of multimodal and translinguistic meaning-making repertoires. At the contextual level, they cross the boundaries between the digital and the face-to-face, between geographic locations, and between various social practices (i.e. *Dawei*’s heritage language practices intersected with the adults’ reunion ritual). This boundary crossing nature of *Dawei*’s literacy practices as illustrated in the WeChat interaction results from the intersection between (at least) two types of mobility: geographic—population movement, and technological—the spread of mobile phones and social media platforms. To put it in another way, with the advances in mobile communication hardware and software technologies, family literacy practices of

multilingual immigrant children like *Dawei* are no longer confined to a single tangible site—the home. They move between different sites in the country of their residence, the country of their origin as well as various transnational sites.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will review some of the key findings from the WeChat project, focusing on young children's heritage language learning with social media technologies. My main aim here is not to offer a comprehensive report of the project, some findings discussed in this chapter have not been previously published, while others can be read in Zhao & Flewitt (forthcoming). Rather, the focus is on issues pertained to data collection that arose in the WeChat project. Through a critical analysis of the detour I took, the choices I made and the rationale behind them, I hope to map out the key aspects that researchers of transnational literacy practices of young children or migrant children might consider. It is important to mention at this stage that I do not wish to suggest that the methods I used can be readily adapted for other projects. Perhaps one of the most important lessons I have learned from the field is the importance of understanding our participants (their age, social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds) in designing and adapting research methods. An iterative approach to data collection is recommended when studying an emerging phenomenon such as transnational literacy. Building good relations with participating families and gaining children's trust are critical in such an approach. In the final part of the paper, I will also briefly draw on my current project which aims to develop new digital methods for studying the digital and multilingual literacy practices of children on the move. In the second project, I am working with a group of young immigrant children aged 5 to 6 with diverse cultural linguistic backgrounds at an English medium international school in Denmark.

Methods for studying family literacy practices and adult-child interactions in the context of home

I would like to start my discussion by tracing the development of the WeChat project in relation to my own disciplinary training in linguistics. Linguistic studies of family literacy practices and adult-child interactions at home have some established practices. As the main purpose of a linguistic study is to understand 'naturally' occurred interactions in a given social context, the key consideration in choosing a data collection method is how well it preserves the 'naturalness' of the interactional data. One common method used was to ask

parents or caregivers to audio record their interactions with children at a time and place of their convenience, typically focusing on a particular practice such as shared book reading (Torr 2007) or getting dressed (Hasan and Cloran 1990). This method is also considered less intrusive for the participants, as parents and children have more control in deciding when and what to record (Torr and Clugston 1999).

With the development of multimodal theories of literacy and communication, audio recording, which cannot capture non-verbal modes of communication, is no longer considered adequate. Video method or 'video-based fieldwork' that involves 'the collection of naturally occurring data using video cameras' (Jewitt 2012, p.2) has become the 'default' choice of method. The video method is often supplemented by other ethnographic methods such as participant observation and interview. This methodological design is fairly established within social sciences, especially for projects aiming to study patterns of social interaction. Guidelines for good practices can be read in Jewitt (2012), Goodman, et al (2014) and with specific reference to the early childhood context, in Flewitt (2006); and applications of video methods in studying young children's learning and play with digital technologies at home can be found in Akhter (2016), Kucirkova, Sheehy and Messer (2015), Kucirkova and Sakr (2015), and Marsh et al. (2017).

When recording social interactions mediated by technology, recording techniques need to be carefully decided, such as camera types, the placement of the camera (See Caton and Hackett in this volume), and the capturing of on-screen activities (See Fallon in this volume). This is particularly relevant for those who wish to undertake a fine-grained multimodal analysis, as data need to be captured in such details that it can subsequently be transcribed (Bezemer and Mavers 2011; Cowan 2014; Flewitt et al. 2009) and analysed. These details can include—depending on the research questions of the project— the verbal and non-verbal interactions between participants (e.g. speech is clearly recorded, gestures of the participants are in full view), and between the participant(s) and the technological interface (e.g. a child tapping on a particular area of the screen).

The WeChat project was originally inspired by a study by Kelly (2013), which looked at how grandparents scaffold the language learning and play of their geographically distant grandchildren on Skype. There were also other emerging studies reporting the use of digital technologies and social media for distance intergenerational communication by bilingual

migrant children (Morgan and Peter 2014). Kelly embraced a multimodal analytical framework (Kress et al. 2014; Kress and Leeuwen 2006), and collected her dataset using methods and methodological design commonly adopted in video-based field work. The design of the WeChat project had aimed to replicate her Skype study, in particular her recording technique. Kelly described her recording process, which appeared fairly straightforward. According to Kelly, ‘data relating to the detailed communicative exchanges through remote technology were obtained by filming and recording the grandparents’ view of the screen and transcribing and coding the material’ (p5.). Using this method, she was able to capture the interaction between the participants on screen. In her video data, the body of the grandparents who usually sat in front of the computer in the UK appeared in a small box on the lower left-hand side of the screen, while the children and their parents in Australia occupy the centre of the video frame. The children were constantly moving as they were playing, which resulted in ‘constant repositioning of the camera, normally by their mother, to focus on them or the objects of their attention, resulting in a fluidity of movement that gave a variability to the images on the screen in the United Kingdom (p. 5).

Shortly after I started the fieldwork in London, the original research design had to be adjusted, as we encountered different practices in the field to those we had anticipated, and a reluctance in the families for video cameras to be used in the privacy of their homes. There are several possible explanations for this reluctance. The first is the increasing privacy concern of parents in the age of social media. The second has to do with my complicated ‘inside/outsider’ (Kusow, 2003) status in the field. While sharing the same language and cultural heritage with the families, I, a Chinese immigrant to Australia, have experienced immigration in a different national context. Not being based in the UK permanently at the time also meant I was not able to establish with the families the type of trust a researcher in a long-term ethnographic project could have. Different cultural attitudes towards video filming young children in the family context might be a third contributing factor, an issue that worth further exploring.

The dataset I eventually collected consisted of digital records (video clips and screenshots of children’s WeChat-based heritage language and literacy practices) submitted by parents, interview data, and fieldnotes (observation in a Saturday Chinese school and during home visits) (see Zhao & Flewitt, forthcoming). The only family that was video-recorded was *Dawei’s*. The video data, showing the brothers talking to their maternal grandparents on

WeChat using their mother's iPad was not analysed in detail as it was not sufficient both in terms of quantity, or quality for a detailed multimodal study of social interaction. The video data was, therefore, used as 'fieldnotes' to contextualise our interpretation of the dataset.

With hindsight, several details in Kelly's description of her research were overlooked in the initial data collection design of the WeChat project: 1) Kelly was studying her own grandchildren and the interaction was recorded from her perspective; 2) Kelly and her grandchildren were communicating in their home language as well as the children's L1 (first language)—English. English is also the dominant language in the countries where they lived respectively at the time, the UK and Australia; 3) Kelly took initiation in the intergenerational Skype interaction and scaffolded the interaction for her grandchildren; 4) she and her partner, the grandfather of the children, used Skype on their desktop, while the grandchildren used Skype on iPad and were in fact constantly moving from room to room. In her description, only the final point was directly related to her method. Yet, all factors—our relation to the children, the perspective we take in our research, the cultural-linguistic background of the family and the children, the technology (hardware and software) and not surprisingly the nature of the social practices—would all impact on how I could (or indeed should) video record naturally occurred WeChat interactions.

Researching young children's heritage language learning on WeChat: Reports from the field

The WeChat project used opportunistic sampling method. A personal contact provided three initial families, who offered access to a local Saturday Chinese school, where six more families were recruited. The families in the project were highly diverse in terms of social-economical background, immigration history, and parental education and linguistic backgrounds, see Table 1.

<<insert Table 1 here>>

Table 1 An overview of the participating families

Through informal and semi-structured interviews, I discovered that children from the participating families did not engage in lengthy video-based interaction with their grandparents or relatives. The parents described their children's participation in WeChat calls

as infrequent or insubstantial, e.g. ‘very brief’ (Families 1 & 8) and involving ‘just greetings’ (Family 5). When asked to offer their perspectives on why the interactions tended to be infrequent and short, parents gave explanations along four lines:

- ***Children’s age***. Several parents believed that their children could not engage in sustained WeChat video call because they were young and easily distracted. For example: ‘*at his age, they are easily distracted*’ (Family 1); ‘*it is very hard for him to sit down for more than a few minutes*’ (Family 5); ‘*she will come over and say hello and move on to something else quickly*’ (Family 7).
- ***Difficulty in coordinating the children’ and the grandparents’ schedules***. Time zone difference between the UK and China was cited as one of contributing factors: ‘*his schedule on Saturdays is full, he has his Chinese classes in the morning and then Kudo in the afternoon*’ (Family 2); ‘*when they come back from the school, it is already bedtime for my parents*’ (Family 6).
- ***Lack of conversation topics***. Some parents believed that the grandparents and the grandchildren did not have much to discuss: ‘*they don’t really have much to discuss with the grandparents*’ (Family 6); ‘*they run out of things to say quickly*’ (Family 8), ‘*children don’t have much to talk about with their grandparents*’ (Family 1)².
- ***Children’s presence on WeChat as ‘reports’ to the grandparents***. Most parents see their WeChat interactions as oriented towards their own parents: ‘*it is really/mainly for the elders*’ (Family 7, 9); ‘*my mother wants to know how he is doing*’ (Family 2).

The sustained interaction as described by Kelly (2013) was only reported by one of the families (Family 7) as a ‘recent’ development. The child of the family was a five-year-old girl. Both of her parents were born in China and came to London for their master’s studies. At the time of data collection, both parents were employed as professionals, and the father, a research scientist, was also pursuing a part-time PhD. In the interview, the father reported that his father—the parental grandfather, was concerned with the lack of communication with

² Three earlier interviews were conducted in English (Family 1, 3 & 4) , Family 2 was interviewed in English as both parents were interviewed. The remaining five interviews were conducted in Chinese translated into English by Zhao.

his granddaughter, because he did not speak English, which was the main language the girl spoke both at home and in school at the time. A few weeks prior to our interview, the grandfather started to look for Chinese learning apps and books for his granddaughter to use, which would then become topics for discussion during their weekly WeChat video chat. As Kelly (2013) observed in her study, adults' scaffolding plays a critical role in generating and maintaining distant intergenerational communication on social media. The absence of adult scaffolding could have contributed to the lack of sustained intergenerational WeChat interaction as reported by the parents in the project. It is also worth mentioning here that the grandfather in this case like Kelly was a university academic, as home background such as educational attainments of caregivers plays a significant role in children's literacy practices (Teale 1986).

However, as the fieldwork progressed on, one of the explanations given by the parents turned out to hold the key to understanding young children's heritage language and literacy practices on WeChat—the parents considered their children's involvement as a performance for the grandparents. This type of performative interaction on family chat group is one of three main forms of interaction identified by a group of researchers (Yu, Huang, and Liu 2017) in a study of Chinese young adults' WeChat communication with their geographically distant parents. Yu *et al.* (2017) referred to it as *panoptic* interaction, and the main purpose of which is to project a sense of positivity for the parents and help to alleviate the parents' concerns for their children living in geographically distant locations. According to Yu *et al.* (2017) WeChat practices, in particular panoptic interactions, are shaped by and at the same time shaping contemporary Chinese familial values, in particular, the notion of filial duties. In 2016, there was little literature to which I could refer.

In the subsequent home visits to three families (2, 5, 9), parents were observed reporting 'news' of their children to the grandparents on WeChat frequently. For two of the families (2, 5), it occurred on a daily basis. The 'reports' took different forms, including text messages, photos and video recordings of the children. The recordings were typically short video clips of children engaging in various daily activities, e.g. playing, telling a story, reading and writing. One common type of video captured children participating in various heritage language and literacy activities in Chinese. Families 2 and 5 agreed (in written consent with verbal assents from the children) to submit a selection of these video clips to us for analysis, while Family 9 turned down our request citing privacy concerns.

When asked about their children's uses of WeChat in the interviews, the parents did not consider these activities as children's participation but *their* reports to the grandparents *about* the children. That is, they saw these videos from the perspective of the adults. In these videos, children seemed to be fully aware of the performative nature of the recordings. For instance, they would typically look into the camera at the beginning and the end of a clip to acknowledge their 'audience', the grandparents. However, when analysed from the perspective of the children, what is fascinating about these videos is the incidental learning of heritage language that occurred during the recording. Figure 3 includes two examples of these videos. In both videos, the children were reading out Chinese texts. The boy on the left was reading out a text from a textbook used in the Saturday Chinese school, whereas the boy on the right was reading out passages from *San Zijing* (三字经) known as *Three Character Classic* in English. It is a classical Chinese text that has been used, over the last 600 years, for children's early literacy learning as well as the teaching of Confucian values (Lee 1996).

<<Insert Figure 3 here>>

Figure 3. WeChat video 'reports': Children's language and literacy practices in Chinese

The video clips collected were transcribed and analysed using multimodal discourse analytical methods. The fine-grained analysis revealed how the making of these videos created incidental heritage language learning opportunities for the children. Table 2 illustrated such an example.

<<Insert Table 2 here>>

Table 2. Parental scaffolding of the child's oral narrative skills in Chinese: Birthday Gifts

In this episode, the mother and the boy were co-constructing a short video clip for the maternal grandmother in China. In the clip, the boy was showing and explaining three sets of present he had received for his birthday. The mother was shooting, so she does not appear in the frame. Nevertheless, her voice can be heard throughout the video.

As can be observed in the transcript of the speech, the boy's spoken Chinese was still developing, with long pauses (e.g. L7,10) and incomplete syntax (e.g. L3, L7). To construct a coherent narrative required scaffolding support by the mother. The mother scaffolded her

child's speech at both the discourse and the lexical level. The formal type (discourse) of scaffolding is best exemplified in S1-S3/L1-6. In this opening scene of the clip, the boy began by showing a gift bought by his mother '*[My] mother bought me this thing called Kailewei*' (L1). The mother interjected by asking why he was given the gift ('Why [have I] bought you this? L2), which prompted the boy's answer that he was 'a good kid' (L4). However, when he was trying to give a second reason, he could not complete the sentence—'*then because [it] is my...*' (L4). So he learned out of the video frame towards his mother (S2). It is possible that he whispered something (not audible in the clip) to the mother, who followed up with another question 'It's your 7th birthday, isn't it?'. The boy was then able to give the second reason for the gift—'[It] is my 7th birthday'. Here the mother asked two questions which were essential to the clip, as they helped the child to contextualise both the key topic (why the gifts were given) and the purpose of the discourse (why the video was made). An example of scaffolding at the lexical level can be observed in S7/L10-11, where the boy tried to explain who gave him the third gift. Again, he could not finish his sentence, and learned towards his mother, whispering in English '*brother*'. The mother responded by first affirming the boy that he was right 'Yes' and then gave the correct wording in Chinese 'your brother'.

As demonstrated in the example in Table 2, when the parents made these video clips as 'progress reports' for the grandparents, they also created incidental heritage language learning episodes for the child(ren). In a study of a Polish-English speaking family's use of video camera, Debski (2017) has observed similar forms of learning occurred in parent-child interactions during recordings. These interactions that occurred in social media centred video making practices are of particular significance to emergent bilingual children like the boy here and *Dawei* and his brother discussed earlier) who live in an English-language dominate environment. They provide children from migrant backgrounds with opportunities to use and learn their heritage language and literacy in contextualised and meaningful ways. As previous studies (Hoff 2006, 2010) have shown, communicative interaction and access to language models are both conducive to language learning.

Heritage language learning was not the only the type of learning occurred during the making of the video. The child was also learning to preform for a particular type of video genre, which are made for sharing on social media. As can be observed in the video frames in Table 2, the boy appeared to be conscious of how he placed his body in relation to the camera and

how his position in the visual frame could create different meaning potentials. He would, for instance, move his body closer to the camera, when he needed to show a new set of toys (S5 & S13). He would ‘lean out of’ the frame when he needed to seek help from his mother (S2 & S7), as this action was not part of the video narrative. His body gestures also suggested that he was fully aware of his audience, chiefly his grandmother in China. For example, In the final scene (S10), he signed off the video by saying goodbye to his grandmother (再见婆婆) while simultaneously moving his hand closer to the screen, making a thumb up gesture. His gesture showed up as the most dominant visual element in the video frame.

In summary, the findings of the WeChat project and existing literature on young children’s learning using social media technologies include:

- Younger children participate in social media, and their practices are often interwound with their parents’ social media practices (Zaman et al. 2016) and other forms of family literacy practices (Marsh et al. 2017).
- These social media related activities (direct chat or video making) often create incidental heritage learning opportunities (Debski 2017) for the children.
- Adults (parents, grandparents and contacts on the family’s social media network) need to provide scaffolding support to create sustained interaction and language learning opportunities (Kelly, 2013, Zhao & Flewitt, forthcoming).
- When young children are engaged in social media practices, there are often several types of learning and socialisation (Zhao & Flewitt, forthcoming) cooccurring all at once.

Reflections on researching young multilingual children’s literacy practices in the age of digital mobility

Reflecting back on the WeChat project, the central dilemma seems to be that we know very little about many emerging forms of technology-mediated practices, especially those of multilingual children from immigrant backgrounds and in the context of home. The rate at which the technology develops exacerbates the problem. One practical solution is to adopt an iterative data collection plan and be flexible in the field. A good understanding of how immigrant families with young children live (Paat 2013) in a given national context would also be helpful in terms of planning practical aspects of the project, such as gaining field

access and scheduling home visits. A thorough understanding of the child(ren)'s linguistic history is critical. This also applies to cases where the researcher shares a language with the child, as will be discussed in the final section.

The WeChat project forced me to re-examine my research practice of video recording within the broader context of the 'video society', where 300 hours of videos are being uploaded onto YouTube every minute (McConnell 2015). When we, the researchers, are video recording the lived experiences of our participants, they are recording and 'performing' their lives for their families, friends and various audiences on social media. These videos are distinctive to videos made by research participants in participatory video research or videography (see Jewitt, 2012), as they are not made with the intervention of the researchers or designed for a specific set of research questions. Yet, they are not private records, but texts made to be shared, read, and 'interpreted'. How can our video recordings of daily interactions of our research participants be understood and interpreted in relation to their own recordings? More importantly, as illustrated in the example in Table 2, children growing up in a video society engage in making and performing for videos from a young age. Their relations to video and video making are shaped by other forms of social practices. What are the implications for researchers who want to use video as a method while working with young children?

Research in an environment that is saturated with video data calls for new ways of thinking about video data. The ubiquity of video making practices in our contemporary lives means that there are more types of video data to be collected and analysed. Some of the video recordings made by research participants could capture spontaneous moments in daily practices that can be hard for researchers to observe in the field. This is particularly relevant when researching transnational literacy practices of immigrant children whose lives move across boundaries. It is impractical if not implausible for researchers to follow the children from one country to another. The video recording made by the families could be a potential data source. However, the ethics of using these 'data' can be problematic and the ethical considerations complicated, a point of which I shall now turn to.

The story of Hannah: Reflection on the ethics of collecting video data of children on the move

Hannah is a 6-year-old trilingual girl of Taiwanese parentage from my current project in Denmark. She has a 3-year-old sister and her father is a research scientist. Hannah was born

in the States where her father was completing his PhD study and has since lived in the UK, Italy and German before the family moved to Denmark in 2017. At the time, she spoke Taiwanese Mandarin as her first language and home language, and German as her second language. When I paid my first home visit in autumn 2017, Hannah had just begun her first year of schooling at an English medium international school. At school, she started to learn English as well as Danish. His father mentioned in the interview that Hannah spoke German with her sister rather than their home language Taiwanese Mandarin and '*taught her little sister German*'. However, I was not able to observe the reported practice at home. Hannah was reluctant to speak German in front of me, although during my observation at the school, I noted that she spoke German with her American teacher, who had lived in Germany previously. Sharing a language with her teacher at school helped Hannah transitioning into the English-speaking school in a Danish-speaking country.

Hannah's language choice is particularly fascinating to a linguist as it challenges our notions of 'native', 'first' or 'home' language. However, I did not have any 'evidence' until five months later, when I was visiting the family after they had just returned from Taiwan. Prior to the Taiwan trip, the family obtained their first iPad. Hannah had learned how to take photos and make videos in the digital English club at school. During the trip, she recorded various aspects of the trip in photos and video clips. Hannah showed me the photos and clips, while recounting her trip in Taiwan. Some of the videos recorded by her showed her sister playing at their grandparents' house, with Hannah talking to her in voice-over in German. Moments like these would have been impossible for me to observe.

With Hannah's assent and her father's consent, I obtained four clips in which her sister's face cannot be seen in the frame. While these videos clip—capturing truly naturally occurring interaction, are valuable for a linguist, I am reluctant to publish the data, as the ethical implications are complicated. At the time of recording, Hannah had no knowledge that the video will be shared with anyone, unlike the video made in the WeChat project. She recorded them as she enjoyed experimenting with the video camera, and they captured highly private and intimate moments between her and her sister. What is my ethical responsibility here? How can I explain to her the privacy implication of sharing these videos with me? These are the questions I have to deal with frequently in the field, where the children would often ask me to take photos of themselves on my personal phone or use my iPads to video record their classmates.

From 2015 to 2018, I worked on two projects with young children from immigrant backgrounds in two different national contexts, during which seismic social-political events have been taking place across the globe. Researching with young children always involves complicated ethical considerations (Flewitt 2005). The infiltration of mainstream discourses by anti-immigration sentiment put children of immigrant backgrounds in a particularly vulnerable position. Collecting video made by and of young multilingual immigrant children can help us understand their unique social experience and language learning practices from their own perspectives. This is important because such data are largely missing from the current literature predominantly focused on monolingual (English speaking) children. However, using this method, like using other video methods with young children, can put privacy and even safety of these children at risk. What are our ethical obligations to our young research participants in the current political environment? I can offer no simple answer or solution. For now, let's remember

... our primary obligation is always to the people we study, not to our project or to a larger discipline. The lives and stories that we hear and study are given to us under a promise, that promise being that we protect those who have shared them with us. (Denzin 1989, 83)

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